SB: So much of it that I've seen is just kind of a series of facts. Like, I've read some of the minutes of the old meetings and I've read, well, I've read some things that Mrs.Raub has at the University of Tampa, but I just don't have any coherent idea of the progression of things around here.

WDM: Well, I know what you're getting at. They are allowing reporters now to be much more personal in writing than they used to be. Hopefully it's objective, but actually it isns't always so, they insert their own personality in it. In fact, it makes much easier reading than it does with just the factual things. The old city editor used to do it so that he could go ahead and cover it, so that he could throw a re-write on it, and you can't throw a re-write on a personal conversation that you might have with somebody. They are running a very interesting thing down at New College this year, perhaps in the spring, I'm not exactly certain.

SB: Is that your son?

WDM: Yes, he's teaching down there. And this will be on the method of writing for newspapers on the, it will be built around that idea. He had donw some work for newspapers when he was a yong man, before he started teaching, and I think that he was trying to bring some of his, of course he has started creative writing down there.

SB: I'd like to talk to him about that. That sounds like a really good idea, because I know when I went to journalism school at the University of Florida, we just went straight, textbook stuff that had nothing to do with what I do now.

WDM: I think it's an interesting thing. I know that when he was on the Tampa Times, during his vacation when he was up at Princeton, and that's when Hampton Dunn was over there. And he was telling me that they made him write just the facts, and is this pertinent or isn't it, we can't take up this much

space. It's a question of space, and the amount of newsprint that you can afford to spend on the story.

SB: Which is a big problem now.

WDM: As I can recall back when newsprint was $7 a ton. And it's only, it's about 85 or 90 now.

SB: (It was up to $400 a ton on the black market.

WDM: We were getting it from Sweden and Norway. That was before they started raising any trees or doing anything locally. they didn't think they could use any of the pine trees that had turpentine in them in those days, and it made quite a difference when they found that they could by some technology.

SB: this is a beautiful house. HOw long ago was this house built?

WDM: It was built in 1913 or 14, I don't know exactly just what year it was.

SB: did your father build It?

WDM: No, my uncle built it, Paul Dickman's father.

SB: Can you just tell me yor earliest recollections of moving here, about your father, what it was like here, or even before you came here. Ya'll lived in MO, didn't you?

WDM: No, I didn't.the Dickmans lived in MO. We were from Chicago. This house was built in about '12 or '13, I think it was started in '12, because the town of Ruskin was platted in 1910, so that would pretty well peg the date.

SB: Well, now, you said you moved here in 1906?

WDM: I moved down here in 1906.

SB: How old were you then?

WDM: I was, I came down on my 9th birthday, January the 3rd.

SB: Oh, mine's on the 4th.

WDM: It was? well, then we happen to be in the same sign then. But I was 9 yrs old on the day that I came in down here. My father had come down, George McA. Miller, was looking for a location in Florida to found a colony of people interested in the cooperative movement, which was in its infancy at that time.

And also he was an emminent socialist of that time, and had founded Ruskin College in Trenton, MO.

SB: Well, how did he, he was a lawyer, is that correect?

WDM: He was a lawyer but he also was an educator.

SB: How did he first get interested in socialism? Was he a real advocate of John Ruskin's?

WDM: No, he wasn't an advocate of John Ruskin's, particularly. there's always so much confusion about that. Ruskin was a very emminent thinker back in the time of Marx and before Lenin, and had considered that everybody should have an education regardless of whether they were of the upper crust or whether they weren't. (276) And in England, it was not possible for anyone except someone who perhaps was of the upper classes, to be able to go to such universities as Oxford. And John Ruskin felt that it would be much better if education were carried to the masses, rather than just making the masses subservient to the higher classes and confining them to mechanical work or farming, or some of the things that could be controlled by the upper class. And they weren't even allowed to do very much from the standpoint of being in business. they might apprentice out, but it wasn't something that they could go ahead and make a career out of. And he had founded a college in Oxford called Ruskin College, which did give a chance for the lowere classes to come and get higher education. And the cooperative movement started back in the late 1800's and one of its main points of growth was at Trenton, MO. And there were a number of people with quite a bit of money who were interested in the cooperative movement, but not particularly in the socialistic movement. but there were a number of cooperative enterprises started in Trenton, MO, so when father felt that the classes should get an upper education if they were going to do anything actually in the movement. Yo could not confine it to the older people, it had to come from up

SB: You mean to get it going so it would be a continuing thing.

WDM: And the difficulty with that type of person was that they did not have the money for tuition or board or room or anything of this kind. so Ruskin College was started on the idea that, of an industrial college, somewhat like Antioch, but not on that same basis that it was before in Antioch or anything else. See, in those days there were no land grant colleges and there were no scholarships put out, particularly and certainly nothing done from a governmental standPoint to make it possible for a person with no money to get a higher education. so that the people that came to Ruskin college could work for their tuition and board and room, so they had to have a very little money to get started, but the difficulty of that was that father would not accept any endowments. Because endowments, somebody's coming up outside.

SB: Oh, I think that's probably the photographer.

WDM: He would not take any endowments because he realised that if he accepted endowments, that he would be obligated to whoever did the endowment. And being a socialist, he recognised that the industrial growth was coming along along capitalistic lines, you see, and they did not want unions at that time. there were no unions to amount to anything, and there was child labor, and all of the women had no vote and things of this kind. Sos the students were able to come and work for their board and room, and they went to school four hours in the morning, then they worked four hours in the afternoon, then they studied four hours, and this was the schedule that they went on.

SB: How did they Pay the instructors?

WDM: well, the instructors were Paid with what money was left over, if any. You had to have dedicated people willing to work with this, because there wasn't, and fortunately we had rather a large family, 7 children, I was the youngest of 7, and outside of one who was killed, all except my brother, the one older than I, did some teaching, see. And then there were other people who were more interested in the movement and doing something, rather than they were in the amount of money that they got, and those we drew quite a lot of

our college--

SB: How did your father decide to come down here to this area?

WDM: well, the reason that he came down here was that we had outgrown the accomodations in Trenton, MO. there were too many students for the facilities, so the college was moved to Glen Illyn, IL, which is a suburb of Chicago. And it went there for three years, and then, this should have been about 1902 or 03, I'm not certain about that time, 1904, I guess, when the college burned down.

SB: somewhere I read, and I can't remember where it was, that at one point, the college started taking contributions from what were considered capitalists and the students went on strike, and

WDM: No, there was never any time that any scholarships or endowments were made, to my certain knowledge. And I know that because.

SB: I think that ws Mr. Noise. I don't know if you're familiar with that particular book.

WDM: there is quite a lot of material over in the Ruskin library. You'll want to go over and check on some of the early ideals.

SB: so he, the college burned down, they needed to move someplace else, during all that time, was there much trouble from the people who lived around there, people who weren't part of the community?

WDM: You're talking about in CHicago? No, there wasn't, except that it was very difficult to get the students jobs, because they did not want anyone who had leftist tendencies. they didn't understand that. And Glen Illyn was not an industrial spot. It was more a suburb where a good many rich people lived, and there was a very large frame hotel there on the lake, and it was quite a place to go in the summer, and those were the facilities that were used. And if you did not jobs that they could go out and work on in a factory or something of this kind, as they do in Antioch, see, they have to leave the school for maybe a year, and work for somebody for one or two semesters at

least, and they can't be doing both things at one time. (434)

SB: so, they would feel it as some kind of a threat, I'm sure, the people in the community.

WDM: Well, it was difficult to get jobs for the men and women who went to school.

SB: there were women at the school, also.

WDM: oh, yes, it was coeducational and always had been. but it was also the time of colonies starting up in Florida, because land was cheap and it was possible to draw people down because they liked being in the sunshine and things of this kind, before any boom, of course, had ever come up. And father felt that he needed to get somewhere fairly close to a large city, but not in a large city, because he would have the same difficuclty he had had in Chicago, and that he would have to make it more of an agricultural coclle9e, more than anything else, if he came away from where industry was. so he located this 12000 acres on which Ruskin was established.

SB: Who did he buy the land from?

WDM: It was bought from a Naval Stores company, I can't give you the name off hand. Naval stores, of course, were turpentine and all the by-products. And there had been a turpentine still, and there still was on the property at the time that we came down.

SB: there weren't many people living around here, were there?

WDM: No,there weren't hardly any. there was two families between Shell Point, which is two miles down this way, and Wimauma, whichc is 7 miles this way. It was just all rough woods.

SB: that must have been a big change for you, coming from a big city.

WDM: It was a big thing for the family, too. Except it was a little harder on the girls, who were in the dating age and I wasn't. So, it made a difference. We didn't have much society down here.

SB: How many families moved down here when you did?

WDM: None of them moved down here when we did, because the land had not been purchased at that time. My father and mother came down in 1906. Father had come down a year before that and had located a hotel down on Shell Point down here which had been put up as kind of a sportsman's hotel for people out of, that were going to Tampa Bay Hotel, and they would come down and do hunting and fishing and things of this kind. and it was on a large shell mound which was at the mouth of the Little Manatee River, which was about 5 acres in extent, and about 50 ft high at the center of it. It was where the indians had camped for many many generations, and fished and got oysters and things of this kind out of the bay and the river. And so we moved down there to start off with, while the plans for buying this larger acreage were going on. And fathr did not have the capital to handle this, and I don't know where the idea came from, but he conceived the idea of discussing the matter with the Dickmans, who were my mother's people.

SB: And where did they live at that time?

WDM: they lived in Sedalia, MO.

SB: so your mother was a Dickman.

WDM: She was a Dickman, she was the oldest of 11 children in the Dickman family. so, father went up and got A.P. Dickman interested in it, and he interested the other two Dickmans, who were L.L. Dickman and N.E. Dickman. And the three families of them came down in about 1908, I think the end of, early 1908. At that time, we moved up from the hotel which was down at shell Point, on up to a turpentine still, the old buildings of the turpentine still, which were about three miles, about a mile up east toward Wimauma on 674.

SB: there was a road going over there?

WDM: Well, there was a road going over to Wimauma, yes. That came from Wimauma, over to the north side of the Manatee river (Little). but at that time there was no bridge or even a fairy across the Little Manatee River, or across the Alafia, as far as that goes. And so, it was nothing but a woods

road, it just went through the woods. And the Dickmans moved into some of the houses that had been put up for the foremen and an old stockade. There was a stockade there because the turpentining had been done by some of these big companies by getting convicts from the state, and then they would pay, say, fifty cents a day for the use of the labor, men and women, and then they had to furnish the guards, and they had the right to shoot them

SB: Mr. Lawler was telling me yesterday that there were a lot of convicts that settled in around here.

WDM: No, there were no convicts that settled around here. the convicts had been gone from here for several years, they evidently had done the first part of the turpentining, but the still was there and it was one of things that was one of the assets, because we could do turpentining, and naval stores somewhat, and they were, the trees hadn't been all cut over at that time, and we had a sawmill, so between the sawmill and the turpenining and what gardens we had, why, it was possible to exist there before the college was started.

SB: so this was just the four families

WDM: that was the four families, yes. And there were two houses between here and Wimauma, two farmers who were natives living out there.

SB: Well, then, the Dickmans put up the money to buy the land?

WDM: Well, they put up quite a bit, because they sold out their holdings there, and they did have mule-drawn equipment and mules and cultivators and things like that, and chickens, which they brought down with them, so it gave us a little stability there, yes.

SB: so when did the other people start moving down?

WDM: They all came at the same time, which was about the end of 1908 or in 1909, I'm not certain, because it was before the land was platted.

SB: these were all people from Glen Illyn, or from Glen Illyn and Trenton, from the different.

WDM: Well, there was none of the faculty that came down, except one that came

down. the rest of the faculty to start the college was within our family, who had all had higher education.

SB: so, you're main idea was not so much to build the community, it was to build the college and let the community grow

WDM: No, it was to build a community as well as a college, because you could not have a college without any town. It was impossible to have a college without a town, and iat was impossible to get any help from a county level here at that time, because it was just a few people sitting down here,and there was very little attention paid. the taxes for this area, shich of course was undeveloped, were very low at that time, so there had to be some kind of a twn government, and it was decided that it would be along the lines of the town hall governments up in New England, where everybody that had a piece of land had a vote in what was done with the common land. And every 5 or 10 acres, or every lot that was sold by the holding company, which was Ruskin Homemakers, that made up the Millers and the Dickmans as the owners.

SB: Oh, I see, so that's where the Commongood thing came in, where people were allowed, people bought and owned their own land

WDM: that's right, they had to own their own land before they became a member of the Commongood Society

SB: but for every land that was sold to them form the holding company, some land was put aside. so this was actually land that was donated by your family and the Dickmans

WDM: that's correct. There had to be some sort of an economic background on this thing, because it wasn't possible for them to get any help to put in a road, for example, or a drainage canal or anaything that needed doing, but if there were land set aside, then the Commongood Society could go ahead and sell that land, and with that money, they could go ahead and develop a little bit.

SB: Now it's becoming clear to me. and each family had to pay to get

WDM: No, they didn't pay anything, they simply, through ownership, each

family became a member of the Common9ood Society.

SB: It wasn't where each family Paid the $500.

WDM: No, there was no exchan9e of money. I doubt seriously whether three of them had $500 to rub a9ainst each other. Cause socialists didn't have it at that time. (585)

WDM: And it did attract not only those who were interested in a cooperative colony, but also those who were interested in the socialist movement.

SB: Was there any kind of organization where this division of labor and division of produce, where things were done on a real socialist level?

WDM: No, there wasn't as far as that was concerned, because the socialist movement did not concern itself particularly with the college, the cooperative movement, I mean, didn't. Most of the students that were attracted here were attracted because they happened to be socialist, or leaning leftward. but most of the people that bought in here were either socialists that wanted to be among people of their own kind, or cooperative interested people, the cooperative movement was fairly strong at that time.

SB: was there a cooperative, a farm cooperative?

WDM: Oh, yes, there was a cooperative, in fact in the original reservations in the deeds, there was a reverter clause so that if you did not conform to what the rules and regulations set down for buying this land, tht your land would then revert to the Commongood Society. There had to be some teeth in it somewhere, and that's the only place they could put them. so that it was that in the original deeds, any kind of stores or anay kind of industry that started up would have to be of a cooperative nature. and the only store that we had, which was just one, and that was cooperative too, and everybody had to buy out of that, because there wasn't any competition allowed, see.

SB: so when each, you had each of these farmers going out on their own land and then shipping their produce together?

WDM: Well, no, there wasn't that, because we had no way of shipping produce. there were no roads, there were no railroads, there was nothing as far as getting it out, and of course they never farmed in a big way at that time, because it was before the mechanism of farming.

SB: so it was kind of a subsistence.

WDM: Yes, it was more of a subsistence arrangement.

SB: Didn't they after a while though, they had ships that went to Tampa?

WDM: Well, there was a boat that went to Tampa. We had to have some connection, some place to buy beans, so we did have a boat, about a 35 ft. boat. And it made regular trips to Tampa, and it would pick up people that were interested in buying or observing the colony or anything of this kind, and they could come down on the boat and they made about three trips a week up to Tampa. Sometimes we'd get up there and a blow would come up, and you'd stay there a week before you got back. but, took four hours to make the trip, so you didn't do an awful lot of shipping.

SB: what were the, if you could just outline the basic rules of the community, from the way you've described it and things, I've read that it wasn't strictly Jonh Ruskin's Policy

WDM: It happened that the college was named Ruskin college because of his thinking about educational matters, and then, coming down here, there had to be a name to the community and they decided to have it the same as the college was. That's how it got it, and people didn't necessarily have to subscribe to all of the thinking of Ruskin any more than Ruskin had to subscribe to all the thinking of Marx. But the cooperative and socialistic movements were pretty well tied together in those days, neither one of them were very strong, and they needed to help each other.

SB: Well, now, women had the same rights as men.

WDM: Yes. If a woman bought a piece of property, she had the same rights in the Commongood society.

SB: It was only, you had to be a property owner.

WDM: You had to be a property owner, and you automatically became then a member of the C.S.

SB: What about religion, were there any kind of

WDM: NO, there wasn't any, there were no regularly recognized churches, denominational churches down in here. Father wasn't a great believer in

denominational churches because there were so many schisms, so many pullin9 back and forth that you mi9ht start a Methodist church, if you would, and then a Baptist would come down and he wouldn't subcribe to what they were doin9, so he wouldn't 9o.

SB: I wondered about this book that your father wrote.

WDM: Well, he was very interested in the social teachin9s of Jesus, his (658)

END OF SIDE ONE

END OF INTERVIEW